



NELLIE DEMPSTER 1896-1926

Nellie Dempster was a well known singer at the New Zealand and South Seas exhibition held in Dunedin 1925/26. Hence the reason for the inscription on her headstone -

NELLIE DEMPSTER

THE EXHIBITION SINGER

DIED 10TH JULY 1926

THE END OF THE LONELY ROAD

The reference to "The end of the lonely road" refers to a song Nellie was most famous for singing - "The Lonely Road".

Nellie had travelled from England to New Zealand with the Swift's Music Publishing Company of London. She was one of a group of singers who sang for customers at the Exhibition as they purchased sheet music. Sadly she became very ill shortly before the exhibition closed and died ten weeks later.

The Evening Star newspaper recorded the following:

Alas, just before the exhibition closed, she was taken with a strange illness which was not at first considered at all serious, but which unfortunately developed in seriousness until, after 10 weeks plucky and exhausting fight in Stafford Hospital, death claimed her.

Nellie died on 10th July 1926 and was buried in the Andersons Bay Cemetery. The Evening Star described her as "a dark complexioned, comely young lady, obviously possessing personality, whose strong, but sweet voice imparted such appealing emphasis to the sentiment of the refrain".

Nellie was thirty years old when she died and was reported to be unmarried, however her death certificate shows she was married in England. The name and details of her husband were absent from the death certificate.

The cause of Nellie's death was ulcerative endocarditis, a condition where a patient has ulcers in the heart. The condition can be caused by a severe systemic infection [an infection travelling in a person's blood].

I have been told by members of the NZSG Dunedin branch that fans of her singing still place flowers on her grave, although many of her admirers have also now passed away. When the photographs on the left were taken in July 2003 there were fresh flowers on the grave.

Research supplied by Heather Bray.